

Message Text

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R 061226Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5503

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 0113

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:HPFOR, LT, SF

SUBJECT: GOL IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA

REF: 75 MASERU 1195

1. SEVERAL RECENT DEVELOPMENTS CONFIRM THAT GOL, WITH C.D. MOLAPO AS MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HIS MOVING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH HAD REACHED A LONG-TIME LOW UNDER FORMER MINISTER J.R.L. KOTSOKOANE AND P.M. PEETE.

2. LESOTHO FOREIGN MINISTER, C. D. MOLAPO, MADE SECOND VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA THIS WEEK SINCE HIS APPOINTMENT LAST NOVEMBER. SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS REPORTS THAT IN BRIEF PRESS CONFERENCE IN CAPE TOWN FEB 4, MOLAPO

DENIED THAT LESOTHO/SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS WERE BAD, INDICATED HIS VISITS TO REPUBLIC WOULD CONTINUE, SAID GOL FAVORED SOUTH AFRICA'S DETENTE EFFORT UNDER TERMS OF LUSAKA MANIFESTO, AND INDICATED
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SOUTH AFRICAN FOCEIGN MINISTER MULLER WAS WELCOME IN LESOTHO. MOLAPO

ALSO REPORTEDLY SAID THAT REASON LESOTHO HAS NOT OPENED DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN SOUTH AFRICA IS FINANCIAL RESTRAINTS; THIS IS SIGNIFICANT CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS GOL POSITION THAT IT WOULD NOT OPEN MISSION BECAUSE IT WOULD NOT SUBJECT ITS DIPLOMATS TO DEGRADATION OF APARTHEID.

3. WHEN MOLAPO WAS APPOINTED AS FOREIGN MINISTER, FIRST CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE HE RECEIVED WAS FROM HILGARD MULLER, AND MOLAPO ARRANGED TO HAVE MESSAGE GIVEN CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY LOCALLY. ALSO, FIRST TRIP MOLAPO MADE AS FOREIGN MINISTER WAS TO CALL ON MULLER IN PRETORIA. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS DISCUSSED AT THAT MEETING WERE ECONOMIC, INCLUDING LESOTHO'S ACCESS TO SOUTH AFRICAN MARKET. MOLAPO HAS TOLD US HE WAS WELL SATISFIED WITH RESULTS OF MEETING, WHICH WAS FOLLOWED UP BY VISIT TO CAPE TOWN IN LATE JANUARY BY GOL MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, K.T.J.HRAKHETLA.

4. IN RECENT CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, MOLAPO SAID THAT ANTAGONISM WHICH HAD CHARACTERIZED LESOTHO/SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS UNDER HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS WAS BASED ON GOOD MORAL PRINCIPLES BUT WAS BAD PRACTICAL POLITICS. HE SAID HE WOULD CONTINUE TO OPPOSE APARTHEID AND WOULD SPEAK OUT AGAINST IT ON APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS, BUT THAT MEANWHILE HE WOULD WORK FOR BETTER EVERYDAY RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. HE SAID HE DID NOT SEE ANY LIKELIHOOD OF ESTABLISHING A DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN SOUTH AFRICA ANYTIME SOON BUT WOULD NOT RULE OUT IDEA COMPLETELY.

5. COMMENT: MOLAPO IS PRINCIPAL PROPONENT IN LESOTHO CABINET OF BETTER RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. HE HAS EXTENSIVE CONTACTS AND LARGE NUMBER OF FRIENDS IN REPUBLIC. IT IS RUMORED THAT HE BENEFITS FINANCIALLY FROM CONNECTIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESSMEN TRADING IN LESOTHO, BUT IF THIS IS SO, IT IS NOT REFLECTED IN HIS VERY MODEST WAY OF LIFE. HIS POSITION IN GOVERNMENT SEEMS SECURE, AND HE IS MOST OFTEN MENTIONED AS SUCCESSOR TO PRIME MINISTER JOANTHAN IF LATTER SHOULD EVER STEP DOWN. FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE, OUTLOOK IS FOR CONTINUED GOL EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. HAUGHT

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